

## Australian Natural History Medallion 2005

### Pauline Reilly

Pauline Reilly joined the Australian Bird and Bat Banding Scheme in August 1958 and held Authority No. 92 until her resignation from the Scheme in 1995. This is probably the earliest documented activity of her long-held interest in birds and natural history which has led to the award of the Australian Natural History Medallion for 2005. The nomination was made by ANGAIIR and was supported by a number of influential people in academic and natural environment management roles.

The Sherbrooke Survey Group was formed by members of the Bird Observers Club in 1958 as a response to the threat of destruction of lyrebird habitat. Pauline Reilly was a member of that group for seven years. From 1964 to 1981 she was regional organiser for the Bird Banding Scheme (a program of CSIRO Division of Wildlife Research) and from 1967 to 1981 she formed and led the Penguin Study Group until a permanent biologist was appointed to the Penguin Parade. She was active on the committee of the Australian Bird Banders' Association (now the Australian Bird Study Association) from 1966 to 1972, serving as Vice-president and President during that time. Pauline instigated and led the Flame Robin Survey in various parts of Victoria.

As well as the field work associated with her long term studies of lyrebirds, Flame Robins, and penguins in Victoria, Pauline led the Penguin Study Group on a trip to the Great Australian Bight and she banded shearwaters with Dr Dominic Serventy on Bass Strait islands. In the austral summer of 1978/79 Pauline Reilly instigated and led a three month study of Gentoo Penguins on Macquarie Island as an unpaid member of the Australian Antarctic Research Expedition (ANARE). She was accompanied by Anne Kerle, a post-graduate student from Monash University, and they found that the birds, five times the weight of a Little Penguin, proved to be a formidable subject to band.

During a muttonbird banding trip to Fisher Island in 1971, Dom Serventy spent

the 16 days convincing Pauline Reilly that she should become President of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union (RAOU). This was at a time when that organisation was emerging from a controversial reform and was facing the prospect of hosting the International Ornithological Congress in Canberra in 1974. She accepted and during her Presidency the decision was taken to move from the cramped quarters of Clunies Ross House; to publish the first part of a new Cheeklist and the Interim List of Songbirds and to set up the Record Appraisal Committee. It was Pauline Reilly who obtained the concession that contributions to the Union for scientific purposes should be tax-deductible, thus acknowledging that projects approved by the Field Investigation Committee would be of scientific importance. It was she who led the delegation to Canberra which convinced the commonwealth department concerned that the Union possessed the human resources capable of compiling an atlas of the distribution of Australian birds. Pauline Reilly, with Stephen Davies and Margaret Blakers, was instrumental in ensuring the national coverage of the project by extensive travelling, calling meetings and inspiring local groups to take up atlassing. Pauline was RAOU President 1972-1975 and on its Research Committee 1969-1984.

The Victorian Wetland Trust was formed in 1988 with Pauline Reilly as its inaugural Vice-President. She held that position until 1993 and was also newsletter editor throughout that time. One of the initiatives of the Trust was to collaborate with Screndip Wildlife Reserve, so Pauline served on its Committee of Management from 1992 to 1996. Another organisation which benefited from her expertise was ANGAIIR where she has been a member since 1983, contributing 'Bird of the Month' for its newsletter for many years.

The Penguin Study Group's findings on the biology of the Little Penguin were published in a series of reports between 1969 and 1974, written by Pauline and Peter

Balmford. Pauline followed this with a series of papers in *Emu* co-authored with Mike Cullen from Monash University. Two of her other study species, the Gentoo Penguin and the Superb Lyrebird, were the subject of additional papers in scientific journals. The 1983 'Ash Wednesday' bushfires at Aireys Inlet have special significance for Pauline as she lost her house and all of her records to them. She has monitored the effect of that wildfire on birds and patterns of recolonisation for more than eighteen years and reported her findings in the literature.

As well as her own writing, Pauline has prepared a number of book reviews and has refereed papers for *Emu*, *Corella*, *The Victorian Naturalist* and *Australian Bird Watcher* (now *Australian Field Ornithology*).

Probably the most well known of Pauline Reilly's books are those written for children. Three of them are teenage novels with a wildlife theme for remedial readers. Another thirty or so contain factual researched material which is told as a story for about 8-year reading level with illustrations that provide accurate information. These books are also used for Primary science and adult LOTE studies. Between 1985 when *The penguin that walks at night* was published and 1998, Will Rolland was the illustrator. A group of four of these books received the Whitley (Natural History) Commendation for the best children's series 1986/87, and five more were awarded the Whitley Commendation for the best children's educational series in 1994.

From 2000 Pauline Reilly and illustrator Kayelene Traynor formed Bristlebird Books. The eleven books published to date under that imprint have all been shortlisted or winners of the Wilderness Society Non-fiction Environment Awards for Children's Literature.

Penguins have been a large part of Pauline Reilly's life and, naturally, have resulted in a number of books: *Fairy Penguins: a brief life history*; *Fairy penguins and earthy people*; *Penguins of the world* (and a Japanese translation) and *Emperor: the magnificent penguin*.

She was co-author of the *Atlas of Australian Birds* (1984), which was awarded the Whitley Medal for best book in

1985, and also wrote *Lyrebird: a natural history*, greatly assisted by her early studies of that species with the Sherbrooke Survey Group.

Pauline Reilly's achievements in ornithology and conservation have been recognised by other awards. In 1981 she became the first female Fellow of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union and in 1994 a member of the Order of Australia. The RAOU Fellow citation described her as the epitome of those 'serious amateurs', and made the award for her distinguished service to Australian ornithology as a field worker, administrator and author. The John Hobbs Medal recognises contributions to ornithology by an amateur, and Pauline Reilly was the 2001 recipient. In 2005 she was awarded by Bird Observers Club of Australia one of the ten inaugural W. Roy Wheeler Medallions for Excellence in Field Ornithology.

Although Pauline's greatest enjoyment comes from field work with birds, she has contributed much to administration and guidance for the community. She served on the Environment Committee of the Sandringham Council from 1976 to 1982 and, for the Surf Coast Shire, she chaired the steering committee which prepared its Conservation Strategy, was a member of its Environment Advisory Committee and its 2020 Vision planning committee. She was Secretary to the Aireys Inlet and District Association and has been called as an expert witness before VCAT hearings related to the Penguin Parade at Phillip Island and habitat encroachment issues for Bristlebirds and wetlands.

Pauline Reilly is still offering guidance to bird watchers and, in recent times, has been acting as mentor to students who carry out field studies in her local area. These activities have not only included a study of Bristlebirds at Aireys Inlet conducted by Deakin University but also research of a Japanese PhD student on Little Penguins in New Zealand. Pauline is a worthy winner of the Australian Natural History Medallion.

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